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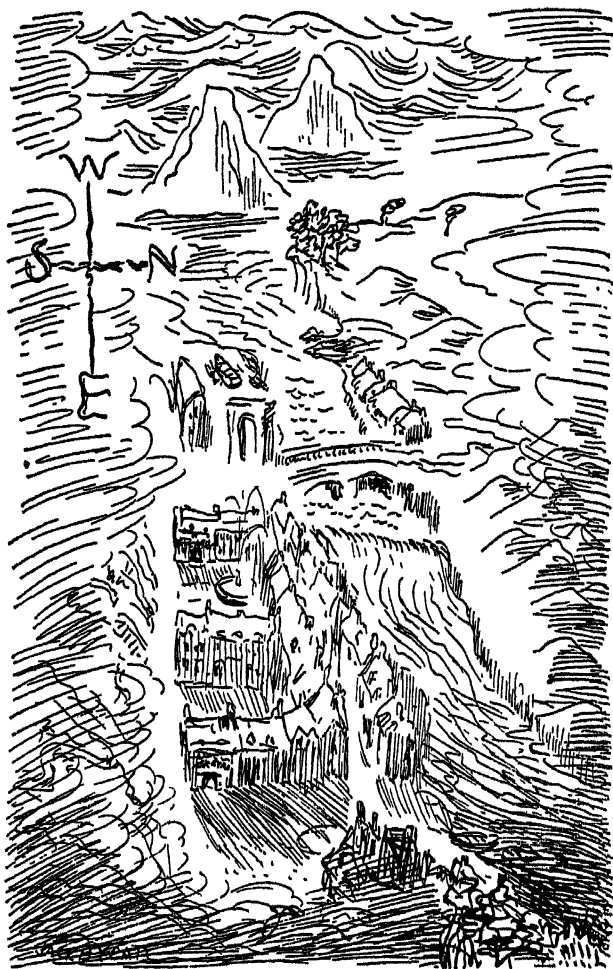
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AH WELL

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IT WAS A VERY SECLUDED TOWN

Jack B. Yeats

AH WELL

A ROMANCE
IN PERPETUITY

Routledge London

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THIS BOOK IS PRODUCED IN COMPLETE
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‘**D**EATH where is Thy Sting?’ We can all say that with cheerful courage every now and then. But who can say it always, who can say it always for a little rabbit lately fallen in death lying in a woodland path in the folly of immobility? This is everything—this flat world is everything. It is flat to us all. Though reason can give us a globe all printed with countries and varnished to hold in our soft round hands. But it is flat to us on the land. We can walk on it, and on the sea our ships can furrow about. There are solid waves on the land and shifting waves on the sea, but still it is all as flat to us as a carpet. But away from thoughted flatness there is a way of space, so we may call it, where there are no things. When we see a waterfall rushing up into the sky to lick a star, we don’t want to say: What sort of a thing is that? We just want to cut a little slit and let ‘thing’ drop out of our vocabulary. If we drop a word which we don’t care much about every little while we might find ourselves understanding the boys who disintegrate space so as to make a little nest for themselves in which to live and take the polish off their ideas.

It would be amusing to be using words for the last time. Careless or careful, letting them float away like paper money of an inflated coinage. While any man makes a picture in his mild memory to match

with a word, 'Coinage' makes him see round metal discs, and inflating them gives him the laugh.

I knew a tiny boy, five years of age, I had heard loving proud parents repeat the wisest prantlings of their bantling. But I do not believe he said: "That's an awful girl that Nanna. She's hid the Aspirin again and I want to sit down and write my blasted old autobiography".

Yes, behind a curtain they play out their games, those others, in a fair land where fashion never becomes quaint. "Doctor, you like it here?" "Yes, no one knows whether I'm a doctor of divinity, medicine or law."

"The conversation is good?"

"Yes, splendid. Anyone speaks as he likes and answers himself. The ladies like it. There are some splendid ones here. Quite the old style and yet new up-to-date." And as he spoke to me, they passed like a whirlwind, and then more slowly they drifted over him like a mist of daisies hiding a field.

"How do you spend your years?" I said to one grand shining fellow.

"We spend them in having good thoughts of you and yours."

And then the curtain so dark, stiff and heavy fell down again from above bristling to the floor. And I saw a small boy, seven or eight years of age, his clothes worn out and tattered, but his face gay and glistening. I saw him on the limb of a tree. He had in his hand a small egg, it was warm. He was robbing a wild bird's nest. He heard the bird give a tearful cry. I saw him put back the egg gently with his

stubby fingers and he slid to the ground. He went a few paces from the tree and he turned his head and saw the bird rustling back to her eggs, and his face was dyed a purple black with the sudden flow of his wild childhood. But may be that boy is dead long ago. I can imagine other boys. I can imagine I am sitting on an old chair and I have before me a curtained screen and on my hands I have puppets, Punch boy and Judy girl, and I can push my hands through the curtain and up over the top of the screen, and I can talk for those two, and I can imagine behind them a great arc of indigo, smeary and distant, everlasting, never fading. But I must fade for I will get tired of imagining.

But my oldest friend, my unshatterable friend of clay. He is a dusty brown. He is the small man come away from his setting. He is the man just seen when

Once on a day
When days were good
In a day of long ago
When an old brown man
On a small brown horse
Rode up a whingey hill
And stood against a sinking sun—
That sun is sinking still.

He sits on my table, just brushing away what he finds there to make room for himself. He dangles one leg in the easy style. He wears his hat because indoor and out of doors are all the same to him.

And he would like perhaps to play that old game of 'I remember' or 'Don't you remember?'.

Don't you remember
Sweet Alice Benbolt.

He doesn't remember her. He's cute enough to pump up a memory from nowhere that would satisfy most people but not me. Where the old man ought to have a heart he has a hollow place and in it a hollow bell without a clapper. That hollow place for a heart—that empty bell is the widest possession he has, for he is a spare man. His bones rustle when he moves, but they are good bones close in the grain and tough. None of them has ever snapped, though he gave them many chances. Now he talks to me :

Now you are a man grown put away those childish things, let us talk about, or let us think about, the only subject fit for the children of a sovereign race. Let us think about Romance—R o o o mance. That's the way they troll it out on the films, and so they should for if it hadn't been for an Irish Jew, called Bret Harte, wistful and envied in the mornings, looking on the coast of Sanfrancisco for comfort and making it for himself with Romance, there would be no film industry. But Romance is always to be found, not under the stones where the little crawly things are, but flowing in the hot breezes on the hot hillsides. There's sweat in Romance. If when the whanging stomached Irish who fled to America

after the famine had been listened to as valuers of John Bull, instead of listening to the little John Bull's valuing of the Irish, it was just a toss up, there would have been no sententious Abraham Lincoln to father his country. No war of the North and South. And what a magnificent Nation the American Nation might have been just now. Still there's bones in the soup and even bales of hay can be worked through. There's always another side—every morass has two sides. The one you step off into it, and the one to step on out of it, but still there it is. And it's only a question of time, and we the good fellows, all hope there's still enough of it left. Where there is Romance left there is 'the make up' I was going to say, but make up has another meaning more readily taken. A surface make-up on a face. Where there is Romance there is the grain, the seed of the charlock bui the wild gold weed of a free sovereign people growing. It was in Mother Eve's Garden and when the snake came sliding he circled it. He knew his match, my friend, juvenile friend.

What are you talking about 'Juvenile'? Look to yourself old Elfin Locks, I say, and that old brown friend pretends not to hear me. He stands by my easel now. Out of respect to it he takes off his hat and puts it down on my paint box, which is the top of a chest of three drawers. And the hat touches my palette, and I take it up, and look at the under-side of its brim, and just as I thought, there are flecks and smears of green paint and dabs of crimson, lip stick colour. I show them to old Brown and he is fascinated to

think that any lips should kiss his hat brim. He's in great form, he's in cackling form for a moment. But I must get a clean white rag and turpentine and clean up his hat brim. He likes the smell of turpentine. He drank a short drink once, a drink brought from far, from fir tree tops. It tasted like the smell of turpentine. But O, but it was good, so dry, so cheering, so like a fair dawn, he says now:

I have an old acquaintance. Oh, very old, he's lived a life of excitements of the body and the spirit. I would say his health had been a long shaking for the last forty years of it. Staggering away to wars, never fit, always with a stripped stern riding on a hard new saddle, and he says he would now live all his life over again in exactly the same way as the first time, doing the same things, having the same troubles for the same satisfactions. He believes it. Though I think six months of a warmed oven hash would drive him into the ground scraping out his grave of retirement with his own paws and no manicure. I myself would live short spells again. There are ten dawns I would see again—if I was able. If I could describe them so as to make them come back in memory to myself I could paint them, myself—me, who know no more of painting than my old hat did. Nevertheless, the one thing would bring the other, that I know. If I could remember I could colour my memory on that clean canvas with its face to the wall there in the corner. It waits my inspiration and still waits. Robert Louis Stevenson knew about the dawn but he swallowed it. My

dawns are my own unsucked, unswallowed lollipops of child's delight. They float before my eyes, but they are on a tide that moves too swiftly for me to measure their finery. Every man has his particular finger prints, and finger prints are a poor entertainment against a dawn.

Dawn is for the men. Sunsets for the ladies. Men all for hope, the women for musings, they say. As a matter not for arguments, it's the other way about. These things ought to be, as is always the way with those two, man and woman, here as I draw it out, in a Round Robin. And he scrawled with a stub of pencil on my palette the word 'woman' in a circle joining the end of n to the beginning of w.

I didn't know you could draw.

I can do everything. But still Hope and Musing aren't so far out. Man always hopes to be brave, manly and all that, and woman muses on bravery because she is brave. I mean naturally brave. Man's courage is only moral courage, woman's is natural. It's the Narcissus business that matters. Woman thinks she sees courage in a man. The mirror up to nature. You can't see anything in a mirror that isn't in yourself. You can make up pictures, by muscular contractions, like an English Public School accent, on an Irish schoolboy. But they are painted with the grey and pink, and blue, matter of your own brain. The mirror is another cup of tea altogether. Do you know why Bull fighters don't care about fighting a cow? It is because the female charges with her eyes open. I give you my word I cannot recall from my

own experience, or my reading of newspapers, one naturally brave man in a large position. And look at the steam-sweat screen that rises around and about the great Heroes of Romance here and there. That's because they're all males. The Amazon she does it on her ear. But then there's the good-natured man and the good-natured woman.

Now, old Brown, you've aired your wise-cracks and they are like any other man's in frosty weather. I've listened and looked like listening, which is far better. So let us play that old game we played many times in the old days. The game of I Remember.

All right, all right. I remember when plays, that are played now as quaint before gigglers in the expensive seats, were played as if the players were the brothers and the sisters, or at least the country or town cousins of the people in the auditorium. I think the quaint toss is the poorest and the most insulting toss ever thrown down before the human life. Wouldn't it be a marvellous thing to thaw out some ancient hero of an ice-age out of his berg, and be so well-mannered and sweet as to be able to sit down with him and discourse of anything that interested him up to the moment the ice took him in the neck? And never confuse him with any up-to-the-minute chat from the surf-washed shores of a Bridge Club.

If people could write plays and books of earlier ages like that how wonderful it would be, to roll back the scroll of time, with no smart Alec. nudging your shoulder, with the pride of a changeling with

a washed neck. I give you my word there are more things in my head than ever will be in yours, because I never barricaded my hollow places against them, the way you did when they came to you confessing they never had a dinner jacket.

Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing to be seeing a play about Kings and Queens and bog-trotters all walking on a little hard grass at the side of the bog and giving out their ideas and plans? So clear that everything that was to come after their days would be forgotten by us. Wouldn't that be grand, and you could do it if you had your mind under your proper control. Those were a stylish people, those, who used only the sled and they knowing full well about the wheel, but being too proud to use it. It wasn't the wheel itself they objected to. How could anyone object to the wheel? but it was the going round and round they could not put up with.

But still I remember. I remember a play I saw once, not so many years ago, but it was an old play then and of times long gone away. The actors were nearly all too young to remember the days when the play was in its prime, and there was no one alive to remember the days the play was pitched in. And yet the greater number of the audience had such respect for the old days that they encased the players and their play in a bright white sugar cave like an Easter egg, and inside that cave the old days were breathing warm because the audience liked to have it so, now was that love?

That was love old dusty Brown.

Oh, don't call me dusty Brown. It's very like

the name of a song sung by a grand young man. A creamy pint of a young variety Artist. And he had a dark muffler on, and an old cap, and brand new patches on his clothes he filled so well. Old dusty Brown. I'm not young enough to be called dusty Brown.

I remember chariot races in a circus under a long glass roof, and the way the outer wheels used to spray up the sand and dust when the driver spun his team at the turn. I remember that too. Dust on a chariot wheel. 'I'm the dust on your chariot wheel,' and up came the other lover, with his white silk handkerchief, with his monogram in the corner, and he dusted off the chariot wheel and she laughed and can you beat it!

I remember a small town where no one ever spoke the truth but all thought it. It was a seaport town, like all the best towns. But there was a lake very near to it. The cold brown bosom of the fresh water, and the blue steel verdigris green corsage of the salt water, and between the two the town. There was a Mayor there, as fine a man as ever you might have seen, born in the town and never more than twenty miles from it, except in his mind, travelling in books of travel. He had never been far away for he was a heavy man for walking and an awkward man on a horse, and on a horse's back was the only dignified way for a man of his age to travel. He was about forty years of age. To be carried in a vehicle would be to him making a bundle of himself too soon. The weather in this town was ever of the bland and sweet, and the air always smelling sweet. It should have

been a rainy place, for it was in a cup of hills. But a rock island, a mountain island, in the sea, off the mouth of the bay before the town, collected all the heavier clouds and caused them to break and run foaming down the mountain side all among the green trees and the moss-covered rocks.

It was a very secluded town, the time I'm remembering it in. The streets of the town were all just laid down in the form of a letter E, with the back of the letter lying along the river bank and the three prongs, sticking out across the flat space at the bottom of the cup in which the town lay. The prongs had between them two squares, one sanded with white sand, the other paved with yellow stone slabs and in the middle a fountain fed from an over-flowing lake, not the town's own brown lake, but a smaller one up among the hills. And the fountain was capable of throwing a spray higher than the houses. Those on the prongs were no more than short three-storied ones. If the wind was blowing strong over the level of the roofs from the sea, as the fountain square was nearest to the sea, the spray would blow over into the sanded square. And when the girls and boys and young men and young women were pacing about there, they'd get a fist full of shining drops on their cheeks and they would brush the drops off into their hands and then put their hands to their lips, and some of the old ones would do the same. They did not worship the fountain, but they loved it dearly. And when the fountain was in a mind to throw its drops it threw them on the malefactor as well as the honest citizen. It was an

impartial town. The Mayor of the town had a beautiful daughter, Ellen, such a simple name for such a grand beauty as she shone with. She had a neck perpetually arched in a forgiving way, which made young men wish to cry, and old men to beat up the young men for their presumption. She was something like her mother except that her mother thought her wonderful and she didn't think about herself at all. She was something like her father. But not so stern looking, not that her father ever frowned. It was just that his brows were set in a line that visitors from afar associated with sternness. The girl's brows were set in two gentle limpid curves and it was by a mental somersault in the brain of the unreasonable that these gentle curves could be associated in any way with sternness. But they were. The Mayor had never received his salary which was a handsome one, and he had been the first citizen of the town since he was a grown man. But if he allowed his salary to remain in arrears, he allowed his own commitments to remain unsettled. There was an idea in his head that he might die, perhaps sooner than usual for a man like himself, and his wife also might pass away, and his daughter also might put off marrying and she might die, and so he would have no grandchild. And therefore he thought that the three of them would be carefree in the bright hereafter. And in meeting any old citizens coming dropping up to join them, there would be no constraint between them as there is between a debtor and a creditor after an account has been settled and a slate wiped. He had been much taken with some

intricate accounts which he had worked out on a dry rock using his wetted finger as a pencil. There was a little warm pool of sea water close to the rock. He stayed by the rock until the rising of the tide washed away all trace of his arithmetic. The old friend, and still creditor, for whom he made the figures waited with him to the end, and together they waddled up along the sandy path by the shore, back into the town, passed the small white thatched cottages on the outskirts and over the bridge, where the brown fresh water tumbled into the salt. At a dark and cavernous place where a merchant, as an afterthought, had set up some casks and sold wine, they sat on an empty box, and drank out of horn cups. The box was only a small one and so they had to sit very close together on it, half turned away from each other. But they could drink in reciprocity for as the wine rolled down into their throats their back bones reverberated with esteem for he who made the wine. The wine merchant stood up leaning against his largest cask and singing in a fo'c'sle drone, for he had heard sailors sing so. He had seen sailors in a mass not so very long ago. Romantic creatures, they had no cargo for the port, no business there at all, but passing on the ocean along beyond the mountain island, they felt it would be romantic to be pirates for a time. Two vessels they had full of rigid looking but sulphurous breathing men. There were so many men in those ships always that they never required cargo or ballast. They were ballasted with men. The wind blew convenient for the horrid ideas, and just at the fall of dark on a

mild November evening they grounded their hookers, half an hour from high water, fifty yards from the fall of fresh water. Then climbed out of the ships. Their names, the ships' names were 'Darkness' and 'Revenge' just names, they had nothing on their mind about this town which I remember. These sailor men they had knives and hand-spikes and they leapt into the town, and behind the counters, and put their hands into the tills, and some of them were all for dallying about and drinking hard drinks, but the leaders, just appointed on the spot, began to lead the way up the stairs of the houses and the men of the town, who had been watching their going on from the first landings of the stairs, just jumped down on them. In five minutes the pirates, with heads, arms and legs broken, were dragging themselves back to their ships. The money they had taken they gave up to the inhabitants of the town as they legged it for the ships, and before they were afloat. They did more. They were in a hurry for the tide had turned and though they had water under their keels it wouldn't be there for long. They searched every cranny of their ships even with candles for any curious money they might have of their own, they were so anxious to pay their footing to be away. They made the open sea and had very nearly all been drowned for they hadn't distributed themselves equally between Darkness and Revenge, and where Revenge was light and high and tipping over to a dangerous degree, Darkness was taking in the green clear water over the topsides. They hove to and equalised their ballasting.

The Mayor was not a heavy drinking man, two or three horns at a time sufficed him, and he never drank facetiously. He just took what he wished, for he had no fear about alcohol's effect on his health for the length of his life, and the appearance of his death, had been revealed to him in a dream. He looked down on the face of his corpse, and it was of a clean, smooth, mild beauty, as of a lake after a swift lake storm had swept over it. He saw that certainly it was not the face of a man slain by alcohol. So why should he tease himself. The great thing is to know, everyone, well nearly everyone, says that.

The Mayor spent happy days waiting for something to happen, that he hoped would never happen. If he waited long enough. But well he knew that 'long enough' meant long after he was dead. A Circus would descend the hills converging on the town by different routes and the Circus would upset the town, for no townsman could ever jump naturally through a hoop. And the young girls of the town, it was a curious town there were no women there but young girls, old maids, and married women, very settled. The young girls wished only for bright athletes of any male age who could spring through a paper balloon, like sharks flashing through pale water. But there it was, while the Mayor was there, the young girls just thought the ingredient young men were as near perfect, as anything but themselves could be. And then the fountain was always, in the late evening, gushing and splashing everyone with rainbow splashes and the brains of the town were

busy working. It was a town in a beautiful rosy condition financially for its exports were far and away larger, and looked larger, than its imports. A frowsy pack-man staggered down the hill one shining morning, and when he climbed out again in the dark evening notching out every step-hold for himself with his iron bound stick, he had an empty pack. All his looking glasses and fancy masks, God save the mark, and hair pinchers were gone, and his head was full of ideas, for sale, when he could find the buyers. But by the time he got to his buyers, the ideas or anyway the meatiest part of them had melted on him like super fine wax in the presence of flaming brimstone.

It was a town with one internal idea, and that was the brown river. Every evening, rain or shine, you would see two or three persons leaning over the rail alongside the back of the letter E and with their mouths open filling their lungs and their bellies with the fragrant, woolly, ever lovely, unsatisfied boggy breathing of that fulsome, flattering, simple-hearted flood. No man within an hour of coming from that river ever beat his child, even in gesture, and that was all the correction the children ever received, first a gesture of punishment and then a gesture of apology. And no dog coming from that river side barked for a space of time. The children of that town did not rule the town as anyone might suspect. No one ruled that town. Not the Mayor, for all he had his golden chain. It ruled itself. He ruled himself, with the varied tone of the river. Ah, she was a bonny river. It was lucky for the old shells and pebbles

within a hundred yards of the falls' edge before she tumbled into the sea. They, it didn't matter how strong the stream was, were always caught up among the rocks on the Easterly side of the falls, and never went out to sea. Never again out to the sea they came from long ago when the earth was blazing hot and volcanoes were pitching sea shells above high water mark. These shells and pebbles being ever caught up by the rocks worked their way back again a few yards every now and again up the river. And then would come a freshet and pitch them downward again, past the townsmen leaning over the rail, a foot on a lower rail. A foot on the rail. So human, so docile. The foot on the rail, the arms reclining on a swilled counter quaffing brimmers like their little piggy wiggy grandsires when they were able. All liquids look alike to man, but they feel differently. They go down, they go down. With some the first floor is enough. With some the basement must be reached before the rafters in the garret shake and illuminate themselves with wreathed roses golden edged. But with the men of the town I'm telling you about the river was nearly enough. It was a mountain still frothing its way with the pure elixir of the high places. Three parts the river, a quarter label and the rest some drossy fire from an ignorant unknown crucible, and the townsman went back into the sandy square and kissed his hand to the falling fountain drops.

There were a lot of people in this God-damned town, most of them different, different in wedges, not in families. Precarious corralling of human

beings under roof trees. So these wedges, these different wedges, came from different families and mixed themselves. Perhaps each wedge contained all the necessary ingredients of a wedge, wedge into wedge, and then wedge. That's a non plus. No, they broke away when they felt that coming and starred out into groups of character.

It was a slip of the tongue calling this town a 'God-damned town'. I should not have used that description. It's lost its original meaning. There was a time when a lot of thin hawk-men standing about on their thin soled boots would know the way I was using the description. It's an affectionate term, and as long as I live I'm not going to tell you any more about affectionate terms. If you don't understand them when they drop from my lips, then you never will, God help you.

This nice town had a lot of actors in it, and two actresses. It was not thought nice for women to appear on the stage with a bunch of men. These actors they were for ever rehearsing. There were two Theatres. The Round and the Square. The Round was called 'The Round' because it was round the corner, just round the end of the top-most prong of the letter E. The Square Theatre was on the inside of the lowest prong of the E in the fountain Square. There was no rivalry between the Companies of players. When plays were in season the Theatres were open on alternate nights.

The actors were even game enough to rehearse in the open air. You'd see a couple rehearsing a fight with long swords along the back of the E due

West with a purple light from a grinning sun, and it sinking, playing on the face and front of one of them. The other with the nape of his neck, his spine and his heels as stained as a slit wine skin. Then the two bright boys whacking away with the hoop irons. And up aloft, as demure as you please, the two women players looking out of their window down on the dusty fray.

Ah, them was the times, hot dust, and two or three, no, more, great dollops of thunder drops falling from a cloud rolling away to break itself on one of the surrounding hilltops, and to empty itself over the other side, to whang the unfortunate tillers of the soil, who were trying to grow crops by a calendar, just for the fun of feeding the people of the unctuous town.

And the plays they put on, and every one member of the companies word perfect, were what most people would consider difficult for amateurs. Historical plays, maybe about the hero of old who walked along the bottom of the river at full flood like a submarine man holding his breath for fifteen minutes. A miracle! He walked that way passing the town because he did not wish to disturb friend or foe. Then maybe they'd throw an amusing drama about a foreigner from a far country asking for nick-nacks in the town shop, souvenirs to take home to his ancient home in Hack-me-Tack. But what of it. If you went to one Theatre and found it all dark, you'd hammer at the stage door and the Company would come out, perhaps for a rehearsal, and some in costume, some in their own clothes. They would

lead you to the other Theatre. The Round Theatre to the Square or vice versa. If they were in a good humour, they'd bring along some gilded cardboard musical instruments, Angel post horns, and fifes, and round about trumpets, and slack old drums. And if no noise came from the instruments, they would say the noise, 'Thimble, thumble, thump' for the drum, and 'wee, wee, wee' for the fifes. All very pleasant and obliging. It was a sinless place, a kind of a fool's paradise. A sort of Tom Tiddler's ground. But every now and then it became something else and some sugar plum filled young bull man would walk down beyond the dark trees where there was a small cliff above a deep pool in the salt tide. He'd choose the full ebb, and shoot himself so that he'd fall in the waters and have his body rolled away. It was a kind of gentility with them to do that.

There were a lot of boys and girls in this town that seemed to have nothing else to do but wander about and make sheep's eyes at each other. It was a town that seemed to have more than its share of twilight. It was the hills that ringed it round and kept the light back, except from one quarter, the Sou' West, and from there the sun could pour up the gully of the salt river and until it sank into the deep West. Whatever cloudy blur there was during the day, on nine evenings out of ten, the sun would go down strong and bright, and the last old townsman by the rail by the river side, would get it glinted into his old eye. There was plenty of good tradesmen in the town, men who could make barrels, and boot makers, and carpenters and joiners, who made chairs and

there was an anchor smith and it was a long time since he made an anchor. But still if any ship sailing the wide sea beyond the Mountain Island at the river mouth had his anchor bitten off by that Great Leviathan, and her Captain knew where he was, he could have come up to the town, and while his ship lay at the Quay, have a new anchor made to his ship's requirement. He could sit in the smith's shanty and see the anchor grow before his stupid eyes, under the smith's hammer, and it was he who could swing a sled good and lusty, and before the Captain had chewed over his whole bag of rags, there would be a beautiful new anchor. As fresh and new to work, and lively working, as a ship newly launched. And the man who weeps when he sees a ship, her big chains rumbling and her grease slithering, and the heavy lumps of timber rattling away from her, as she enters the water, is a dangerous man. But a horrible man is the man who at such a time does not have the longing on him for tears.

There was a Fair Green in the town, but not in use for a long while. It was to the Eastward of the top prong of the E and in the early morning it was often a sunny place. But once a lost calf cried piteously all night there for its mother and the cow came from a hill and climbed down letting herself slip down the steepest bank until she found and consoled the calf.

Then Fairs dwindled on the people of that town. Their meat was brought to them in the basket or in the cart. I don't believe I am giving you a proper idea of this ancient town. The hall doors on the

houses, both the private houses and the shops, were very heavy with bands of iron on them and terrific nails. The hall doors of the shops would be to one side of the shop window and the hall inside would have no connection with the shop, except by a devious route along the hall, and then a turn along a passage, lit from the top, and then a turn sharp, and a little slivver of a door could be pulled towards you, and you could slip into the shop. It was a kind of traveller's experience, like a man leaving a thundering machinery room in a factory to go into a little office box with a tight fitting door, and then coming out again into the din. On a busy day, or most any day that wasn't too dreeping with rain, out in the street you'd be all in the middle of a maze of noises, old cart wheels grinding and thumping, people jawing one another, people rolling barrels and dragging wooden cases. And a man wheeling along a two-wheeled truck loaded and grumbling with a hard old axle, and the grease on it black and choked. And another man dusted with flour and meal rattling an empty truck over the cobble stones at the entrance to a yard. Then, your ears boomy with the noise, you'd go in at the hall door and the door would shut after you, and there you'd find the hall as silent as the grave. So silent it'd be that you'd look at the old steel engraving on the Easterly wall, and you'd think everything looked so quiet and settled down in itself, that the engraving was giving off a noise. The movement in it, the classical horse prancing on the stones of an antique street in—may be Athens.

And you'd sit down on a hard chair in the hall, a mahogany chair, nearly carved out of one solid piece, and you'd cross your feet and let yourself pull yourself together. And you'd let your teasing thought lie down inside you for a little while. There in the quiet stillness, and you'd see the light creeping on the wall in front of you, reflected from the wall behind you, for all the walls of the hall were heavy with varnish. After you were resting there a little while, your worrying to be moving would be on you again and you go along slowly down the back of the hall till you come to the passage lit from the top and you begin to smell something out of the shop, candles, and salt beef, or old Demerara sugar. That would make you quiver your nostril. The wild steed of the desert snuffing something. You take the handle of the narrow door in your own hand and turn it and this pulls the door towards you, and in a second your nose would forget to smell anything your ears would be so busy hearing again the noise of the town, deeper and more mournful, coming through the depth of the shop. And in the narrow doorway, standing heavy on your feet, a warm package would push by your ankle, and looking down you would see a small, hairy, long figured dog dart under a counter and begin rattling boxes about, and in a moment you'd hear him crunching biscuits. You'd know that the dog had been in the shadows by your side all the time you were in the hall waiting with carefree patience while you rested on the hard seat. If you had taken a notion to walk up through the house up to the attic where the old travelling trunk

with the patches of leather nailed to it, and the worn out boots, and the ancient horse harness, and man's harness, and a gilded body of armour for a Roman sentry in a play, either the Square or the Round, were heaped about. If you went up into the attic you would drag the trunk under the skylight and you'd balance yourself on top of the trunk and you'd push up the skylight and look on the roofs of my town. And you'd be surprised and pleased to see so much of green moss and grass and even wheat growing along the side of the roofs and round the chimney pots, and fine round saucers of lytchens spotting every slate.'

If you started up the stairs the dog would follow you to the first floor and even to the second, but not to the attic. No, if you visited the attic, when you got below to the ground floor again, you'd find the long dog with his short legs tucked close into his body while he lay on his belly. He would be waiting silently for you to wake up to his branch of the afternoon's party—the opening of the narrow door.

Any man who ever had the good luck to accomplish the opening of the narrow door was never forgotten, he became indeed a friend. One that the dog expected to meet at any moment, anywhere, in time or out of it. That was the way the dog felt about it. He had no doubts. He had had a good and a gentle mother who, through having a good home in a box near the kitchen for herself and her litter, had never had to consider any harsh training for her puppies. They had acquired all their knowledge without tears. A mass of governors and guardians had not

enjoyed treating him like a tree for tourists to carve their ridiculous initials on. How ridiculous initials do look if you suddenly come on them. This little dog had no initials. Indeed, very few persons, and those only late comers, unruly, half-scared visitors from anywhere, who had come down into the town, and got caught there by the tangling dew about the edges of the Fair Green had initials. And these visitors would look as if they were settled for ever in the town, and then one afternoon when the darkness was threatening they'd pack up and carry themselves and their gear away with them out of the town but never by the same side as they came in. It is a fact that any of these strange ones that got the town's dew on their feet, got the idea that they could begin again in some other town, perhaps a different shaped town. Begin again, they thought this time with a grand spirit in their breasts. There was a moment when they felt the dark dew with their white hands for the first time, a moment that had gone for ever from them, as far as this town went, and they never used the moment properly to get the full blast out of it. And they knew there was no way for them to have that chance among the beads of dew again in this town. But in another town, perhaps, they'd get a second chance. Perhaps they wouldn't but anyway they are trying. It was intolerable to see the faces of the townspeople going by them at a level with their own crooked mugs, and the townspeople's faces, sometime blue and pale with the valley damp, and sometimes bright with yellow sunshine coming in obliquely. It was more than they could bear because

the townspeople's faces were happy looking. That's not to say that the people were all merry, laughing Merry Andrews, and whatever the female of Andrew is. It's just their faces were calm and waved to a pulsing calmness. Not because they were bursting with happiness, but because they knew always, awake or asleep, walking or sitting, leaning or springing up, that there was a happiness.

They would be going some night to the Theatre, the Square Theatre perhaps. All the grown people almost of the town that could fit into the Theatre. They sit there on benches and stuffed chairs with their hands loosely folded before them, and they'd see a drama of love and hate and evil. Plotting, murdering, virtue triumphant and villainy triumphant too. Sometimes in the play, if it seemed pleasant to do so, they would weep a little in an unconcerned way. But when the play was over out in the darkness of the streets, the streets were only lit by the lighted windows of the citizens, so there were a good many dark patches. Out in the darkness they would only talk of how the play was done. They never spoke of their feelings about the plot, they never had any feelings about it. The play was a miniature event which happened inside a glass ball. The ball could be put away on a shelf, far back on the shelf, and it could be dusted sometimes, and if you peered in closely you could see the play inside. If you were a young girl and very beautiful you peered so closely that your eyelashes would curl and collect any specks of dust you had left on the glass with the first rub you gave it. But it was a good play which was

preserved. The most of them rolled down and away in the hollow places of the memory. Those places sank into the inner sides of mountain mines, subterranean lakes, fathomless. Hold up a candle over your head, fathomless! aw, aw, aw, if I slipped now, and the natural wharf at the side of the subterranean lake slippery. No, no, nothing, do stand back from the edge. All right so far. But the people of that old town had other things to amuse themselves than plays at a Theatre. They had Hell and hate and evil desire and they nursed backbiting. They encouraged it in each other. They were dishonest in argument. They neighed after the things they saw in the shop windows just when they didn't have any money. And it was often the grown men and women of that town were hard up. The economy, taken wide, of that town was ramshackle. One time some people had had some capital. But it would be hard to tell in the time I'm speaking of who had any now. They were owers. They loved owing. They thought it brought out all the real human virtues. So the Mayor was not peculiar in having a creditor. He was only odd in the way he thought of the creditor from time to time. He was a man who woke early in the morning before the world about his feet, or about the feet of his house, was awake. And he'd lie in his bed there in the back room, that looked down on the yard, and he'd think of curious, clever, humorous things to say to his heavy creditor. But what was the good of that? When, on his way to see his creditor, he met a friend he would tell the friend the last funny thing he had ready up his sleeve close to the bone of his arm

ready for the damn fool creditor. But his friends couldn't see that it was right, couldn't see it served any purpose to make fun for a man who was only a damn fool because the Mayor was making him one. The Mayor's friend after he heard the witticisms would be worried a little while; for fun to him, as to most of the men of the town, and all the women, was just a faint rattle drum accompaniment to the rolling up and rolling down of the dark spectacle of being alive; for to all the grown people of the town, after they had had their morning's milk, the sky was wrapped and rolled in a blasting blue tragedy of night in day. It seemed so to them, while reason, if they had cared to use it, would have told them that on either hand the sky was in reality flat with serenity, if it was such a day to ignoramuses who might be moving about in countries outside that town. One morning at eleven o'clock, a man, a stranger, on his back, was suddenly noticed, by some citizens looking out of an attic window. The man lay in the middle of the long street and a long knife was pushed through his breast into the roadway beneath him. The man was dead, his shirt and his jacket were soaked with his blood. His face was a useless putty colour. He lay neatly and flatly like an effigy prepared, perhaps for a bonfire, lying waiting until he was wanted. The blow he received must have been given by an assailant who had his two hands on the knife's haft and he must have thrown all his weight behind the knife, and then fallen with the dead man and on top of him. People in the town, who had seen such things done in dreams, knew how

the filthy deed was done. They pointed out where the sticker man with his legs spread fell on the dead man. They could see the mark of the knees of his moleskin trousers in the clay on either side of the dead man's legs, and they could see where as the sticker man came down the toes of his boots slid away on the ground. There was nothing in the nature of an inquest. The Mayor said he'd not call one. There was not enough evidence for anyone to make anything out of. By night the people had forgotten even the spot in the roadway where the sharp knife-slit with the bloody edges was under the man when he was lifted. Small red lips calling for revenge. The townspeople saw it that way. But the revenging did not devolve on them. They forgot it all and stood by their brown river and they were pleased that it should be strong with old heavy showers.

It was a town of people always in the prime of life. There were young children there, running and tumbling, hither and yon, and two asses, which gentle mothers had foaled a month before I got into the town. But all the time I was there, there were no births, and no deaths. It was curious there was a kind of stagnation in the trades, the people in the town themselves noted it. No deaths, no burials. It was no loss financially to anyone, for queer enough there was no Undertaker in the town. No coffin maker, no hearse, no black horses to put under a hearse. All the horses I ever saw were fawny or red and dark brown, and they weren't what I'd call horses. They were what I'd name as round ponies. But the people said they were little horses. Certainly

is sure as a jewel shines they were always prancing on the Fair Green or through the town, led, ridden, or driven in the small carts and carriages and floats they had there, always coming and going with their round rumps and their tails switching, as if to drive away flies. But I never saw a fly out of doors in the town and I've seen them inside the windows of the attic, when the sun would warm the glass they'd get smish smushing about eating paint and generally having a good time.

From the attic you could see the sky over the hill rims that surrounded the town. But down in the streets, as a general thing, you never looked up, to get a crick in your neck. Why should you, the same cloud, like a blue indigo island, was always nestling down over the very centre of the place, though the edge of the cloud might be fringed with a golden light—I suppose there was a sun blazing somewhere.

There was a kind of a school in the town for teaching drawing and painting. The pupils were of all ages, young and old, men, women and children. They drifted in on a good day in the morning, and they drifted out at dark, and they never asked to eat all the time they were there. There was no artificial lighting in the school, or they might have stayed through the night. Then another time there wouldn't be a living soul in the place for weeks. The leader, there was a teacher, a fine upstanding man with a red beard. He was a native but had been away a while in distant lands beyond the bogs learning wrinkles, but he could make little use of them, a little more use than the elephant, that grand

creature, can make of the wrinkles of his hide which he inherited from his ancestors before you or I were thought of, Jack.

Every morning before the work began, on a working day, the pupils would chase the leader flying round the Statues of the Classic day of Yore which they had there in the passage for the improvement of the people, and they would have him tell out where the beauty of the form did mostly convey itself to the beholder. And then when he was exhausted running and puffing, they'd set him down to make a drawing out of his mind, of something, one of them, it might be a carefree female, thought of. And they would leave him at it, while they improved their dexterity by painting, and drawing, the stony statues, and the barns they were in, and the floors and even themselves. And one time a bird came to a topside window and pecked at it. He was pecking at his own image in the shadowy glass. But they all sat round and painted his likeness in his colours, or drew it in grey pencil. And after a time, looking through his own image, he began to see them sitting there, and learnt that all that looks like looking-glass is not so, and that images may be under images. And there was the ring of pupils drawing the master bird, and there was the bird bobbing and pecking to them. So they sent the teacher out for toasted crumbs and bird seed, and they had the bird in with them. The lightest lad had to climb the high ladder to open the window and take in the bird on his wrist. And three below were holding the ladder, and the top, so narrow, was whipping and weaving

in a spiral. But the young boy got down on the floor with the bird on the fist. And the bird walked on the stools, and on the floor, and on the Model Throne, and sat side by side with the young women on their chairs. And they all held their hands out to him and fed him. He was of an eagle kind, red eyed. But when they talked too much he dropped his eyelids. He was a noble creature. When they opened the window again at the top of the ladder the boy held his fist with the bird on it into the dark blue night, and he was gone. Then they let the leader home to his food, he required it, the creature.

There were other teachers in town teaching the people anything they might find the lack of, that is, as far as the teachers were able. But always the young and old learnt together and whether the song was reduced to the little pipe, or the little piper was held up on a knee and encouraged to roar out with the grown throats, I never understood properly, though I was often in the Schools sitting on the bench learning about the absurd wonders of the stars, and why water will not run uphill and other Fated Lives and Histories too. It made the people laugh. They invented a kind of music one time among themselves. It was a kind of rumbly music, two rumbles, one blow, a cart in a tunnel, and above, another cart passing along over the tunnel, and at intervals, where you willed, there were holes in the road and the rumbling from above would come down like sword and spike through the rumbling underground, and all the time the sound above was shot through with a yellow slanting sun, and what you thought

the sound of that was, and below the tunnel was breathing with a blue-coloured fog, and whatever you thought the sound of that was. They explained it to me at the time, and sitting among them, with them on either side of me, I understood them, but now it's gone, like the thing you thought you heard and weren't quite sure about, like a man would be standing in a desert place and great cactus growing there, or living on its past growth there beside him. And he'd think it gave a sound and he'd look at it and he wouldn't be sure. And for a moment he would be afraid, standing there with his blue shadow and the blue shadow of the cactus and the grey plain. And he wouldn't put his fate to the touch and say out 'am I deaf'. And then hid fear would pass from him and he would pick up a small stone from the desert and pass it from one hand to another, and then he would rise in himself and stride away, and late that night, when he would be drinking water from a can where there was plenty of water, he wouldn't be able to remember as much about himself and the cactus as I am able to tell you. But such a man would not be properly related to the people of this town I'm telling you about. That kind of old business of the desert couldn't happen to them, and while I was with them it couldn't happen to me, but now it could.

One thing troubled me about these people. I never caught them saying a bad thing about any neighbour behind the back, never to me, and yet I knew that they were full of malicious backbiting. If they drew a dagger from a sheath it drank before it

was stabled again. And knowing so, I always was hoping that they were backbiting me when I was away from them up in the attic room, I used for my thinking. An old man and an old woman, who kept a good bold house of drinking, said to me one afternoon when the sun was low and slanting on the floor of the shop. "Go up man under the roof, there's a box with an old rag of a curtain lying against it. Let you recline yourself there with your thoughts. It's a good thinking place. Though it's many years since we climbed to it." It was a good thinking place for me, the sun would come up to the ceiling reflected from one shop window on my side of the street, to another, a shop window, or glasses lying in a window, and so up through the height of the street to my whitey blue ceiling, where the light would flicker and bob. Oh, it was a brave place for thoughts. But as soon as I got up there I found I wasn't thinking, that is, thinking out, planning my ideas, laying one idea against another, one fashion of thought against another. It was more as if I was floating over the roofs of the houses looking clear through the floors of the houses into the basements. And funny things were going on in them basements and cellars. The prongs of the E away from the river, there all the houses had cellars, some had cellar below cellar. The lower ones made, I thought, after the houses were built. But there was no communication from cellar to cellar under the houses. It wasn't that there was a land of gnomes down there living their own lives the way they do day by day in the great Cities of America

where maybe there are thirty floors above the earth, and maybe, ten floors, below, and every floor a village, with more or less everything the heart could wish. This old town of my heart wasn't a bit like that. In one cellar an old man, looking like the prisoner of Chillon before they broke into him, was making, or inventing, a secret for War or Peace, turning corners, dog-earing the world, making suns shine where never a sun shone before. And in another cellar a fat man heavy as lead inventing a boat, a shell to float on great lakes supporting noble rowers, with the muscles of the arms attached to their hearts. His plan to waste no time with muscles, but to link the fingers that grasped the oar, without turn or diversion, with the pulsing throb of the heart. The arms he was thinking could be senseless wires so long as the fists grasped and the heart pulsed.

In a basement, perhaps a man, assisted by a woman, would be putting a blas on a jar of father's wine. So that, by an addition of ingredients in their secret memories, it could come forth as any one wine from any foreign land the heart might pierce with longing for. So it was all things to all men and for all women too, for the women of that old town were judges of what they required. If they wished for a strange, seldom thought of, wine from some far land beyond the river, they had it. And they knew when they had it. It produced poesy to get the wine you longed for.

There were poems in the magazine. They had their magazine every month in that town describing the scenery in the land where the grape grew and

the pineapple swayed, where the own heart's love of a wine was named. I would like to tell you some of the poems that were printed in that magazine of theirs, but I know I would only be making up my own to palm off on you and I'm no cheat.

My grand town is not dead to anyone who was ever in it for two or three days, except to one man, and he died on the side of it. He died out of it, in mind, body, and spirit, and he did right.

I thought I was to die in that town one dark evening in it long ago. I was leaning on the rail over the river. There was a little man-child about four years of age playing on the stone steps that lead down to the river for the women and their buckets. And this young bucko fell in easy and clever. And I lay down on the wall of the quay and as he floated by caught him by the neck band of his shirt, but he wound his arms round my arms and kicked out into the river, and I not being careful enough, was pulled in. I was out in the river, but though there was a good weight of water, still I got bottom, good hard gravel, and so I walked ashore with the young one, pushing him in front of me. He was laughing to himself and his mouth was full of bog water. There was plenty to laugh at—the grown man rolled in the river. But it was n't more than forty feet from where the river rolled over the fall into the dark sea tide, and no four-year-old would be above very long down there. And it wasn't that this child didn't know that. He knew it better than I did. He had often measured his height, and his

weight, against what would happen to his little body rolling over the curving fall. His idea of death wasn't the same as mine was, not even the same as mine was there in that old town. But he knew there was death and little children went into it as well as grown men and women, though he had never known of anyone dying in his four years. It wasn't that he was such a brave child or a foolhardy child, but in the river so strong with the sleep of death, it was the rolling and groaning and snoring of the river water which called him in to play, not a set play arranged, like 'Jump Little Wagtail', but a tussle and a maul, and perhaps, a long sleep in the centre of the field of play. I had myself set inside that child's mind at that time but I lost myself in it afterwards. Though when I was squelching home through a narrow street, after I'd brought him in, I felt security in my wisdom, in a day or two it was gone off into foolishness. I thought after we'd stamped and shaken ourselves on the quay wall that we would go hand in hand to the boy's home. But he disposed the walk to suit the evening. He shot away from me walking heel and toe very brisk like a little soldier of a mountainy band. I never saw that child again to recognise him. Sometimes a round face would look up at me out of a bunch of round faces and smile, and I'd think it was like the under-water smile I got from the river. But I had no surety, and there were plenty of smiling faces looking up above the stones of the streets and from the heaped and worn pavements that boggled your ways along that town.

The old people in my lodgings dried my clothes for me. Hanging them up in their old kitchen I suppose. I took a cup of tea the old woman gave me, and maybe, it was strong with poteen, for I got into my bed and I slept long. I thought being so getting-on-in-years that I was as well in my bed for a while. I told the old people, brief, and brave, what had me in the river. But that's all the boasting I made about it and they, those two old ones, I would say were never a talkative pair.

After that, I was leaning on the rail looking down on the river one evening, and out of the corner of my eye I saw an old man, well not so old, but older than I was then, and he was perched up on big trees felled a long while and intended to be hauled down to the salt water quays and maybe sold away. There were about twenty of these fine logs of trees and they made a comfortable place to sit, and my old boy used to sit. I saw him many days, and he had another old son a bit brighter than himself reading to him out of a heavy book. I never was so impolite as to look over the edge of the book and see what it was. And the reader had a slow drowsy voice, hard to hear any distance away. But my old boy was always listening, though his eyes were wandering, his ears were missing nothing. They were like what you might call cornucopias in a receptive mood.

Well, this evening the light was nearly gone and there could be very little more reading by the light of the sun dimming there among the old store-house walls. My old man came over to me and he leant

on the rail and slid his old dry hot body up against mine, and he talked out. There were only ourselves there, for his reader folded his book's covers in on the grey leaves, and with it up in his arm pit, moved away and up a narrow alley to his home where maybe there would be a lamp lit.

My old boy said: "There's nothing in the death. They have us humbugged. Sure half the people in this town are dead. They get up in the morning. They eat their breakfast, they take a turn up the street waiting for a newspaper to be coming in. They go to light the pipe, and they change their mind. They put it away, and then they turn back again to their homes, and between putting away the pipe and turning they die. Or, with more of them, it is that they had a chance to live and they threw it from them.

"Do you know the Mayor? You do, well, there is a man alive, and he is living so that he may die, for he has to die. You will have noticed that there are old men who are very partial to the reading out of books. It is so that the noise of the books may kill the noise of thoughts. Away in China there was a waterfall—a tall great fall of water, and it was so great in the volume that the roar of it could be heard a day's walk away, and travelling people, and people who didn't have to travel, came from every country in those parts, and all of them would be continually and vociferously talking about the roar of that mighty fall of water, going on the way to it, and while they were in its very presence. And then there came a time, a droughty time, and the

waters of the mountains couldn't spare themselves to make a trickle to the fall. But only one man missed the falling water. The roar of the talkers was so occupying in itself that there was no need for the waters at all. I never came across that one man who missed the waters but he must have been a man, sir, of great penetration to be so much wiser than so many. I would like, sir, this moment to hold his shoulder in my hand." And at this moment in his speech, I saw his fingers crooking for it. My old man took my shoulder in his grip, and I, oh, what could I do, but shake my head. He held his fingers so close that if there had been a single star out in the sky, but the night was too far off yet, I could have given my spirit into the spirit of that wise man he longed for. And my old man waited breathing short warm breaths a little while, and then spoke of the lake, from which our river flowed, and of how cosy the wild water birds had their nesting places among the reeds. That was by the rail over the fresh water. But while I was in that town, I would often in the morning, near growing to noon, go across the road to the Westward of the town gate, and sit on a dry old broken-down boat on the quay by the salt water. On the salt sea weeds, when the tide was far out, there was a strong smell, but a healthy smell that would make you tipsy, if you had no knowledge of a better way of being tipsy. I wouldn't be long sitting on the old boat before a middle-aged man with a short brown clipped beard laced with grey would come and sit on the gunwale by my side. He was a man heavily sunburnt. I don't

think he was ever in a house except when he slept. As soon as he was sat beside me a tall round built woman with dark brown hair and a milk and rose complexion, and she no longer young, would come and sit herself on the other side of the old boat, and she would have a pair of binoculars in her lap. And every few minutes she would lift them to her eyes and look out and down the river. That is the salt river, to the ocean. She only spoke herself but seldom, just a word or two to me. She never spoke to the man beside me on my right, nor did he speak to her. And it wasn't that he confined his speech to subjects suitable for a milk white woman's mouth. I had a box of little short cigars. A publican in the main street of the town gave me the box one evening. He said "I have a fancy to give you those little cigars. I think of foolish things". I used to every now and then, if the day was dry and suitable, smoke one of these little cigars and give one to my stubble bearded friend. We both liked them. But it was a long time, so slow is the mind at periods in our lives, before I thought to offer the woman one. She took it like a mouthful of spring water on a parching day. But the next time I offered her one she smiled a loughy pleasant smile, but would not take it. And never would she take a smoke again, even when I rolled a cigarette, and it wasn't that she hadn't smoked the cigar the first time to the end. She'd drawn away from it every breath and whiff there was in it, making it last, and living with it to the stump. The time she spoke I'll tell you what she said. It must have been after she'd heard my com-

panion and myself talking too deep and too long for many meetings, for she said :

“Men are queer, but not half as queer as women think themselves. I wish I had the sense of a ship. Surely they must have sense.”

The only other time she spoke was one evening just when it was getting dark. The man must have been talking longer and wilder than any time, for the woman said :

“I am satisfied. That man has satisfied me. He has the power of speech that would give satisfaction to anyone who cared to hear him.”

She rose up slowly then and went walking away along on the quay to the West. She may have been just a traveller lodging for a time in the town, if that were possible. Or she may have found some other spot to look out from along the tide—for I never saw her again.

I was standing in my old town itself one day by the fountain and a woman came and sat on the edge of the bowl that caught the fountain's falling water, and she was full of talk, bold and free. But nothing that you, sir, could take exception to so early in the morning. And with laughing, she was lying back holding on to the rim with flat white hands, and in a twinkling of the water spray she was nearly in the water. So, hand quicker than thought,—ah, woe is me 'tis often so—I pitched out my left arm and caught her by the long bright brown barley sugar curl that flew out before her right ear. Most ungallant, but I pulled her up straight and she didn't

get all soused. She was grateful to me and well she might be for a rich son of that town had sent from foreign lands to the Mayor a sum of money to keep, he hoped for all time, the fountain splashing full and fair. But what with more people washing, and the expense of bringing water into a town, she could only be a gusher three days a week in the hot summer. Though every day in the winter she prided herself with her shining waters. Night and day then she splashed her way to the grey sea way grey—say that's poeatray.

The day the woman, the woman with the curly locks, nearly went in was one of the special fountain days of summer. When she'd settled herself again, the woman, she said to me: "You're a queer old man." And I wasn't so old at all at that time. "And I'll tell you a secret. A wise woman said to me once." There was a wise woman once. Keep that to yourself and don't forget it. "And now," says the woman on the fountain rim, "I'm telling it to you."

Was her name by any manner of chance Eve? I said, lifting my hand to my head to lift my hat which I hadn't got on having dodged out of my lodgings without it.

"No," the fountainy woman said to me. "She came from a different strain. She passed by Eve in a whirlwind and left her chewing her apple."

Madame, I said, I'll ask you no questions for you have all the answers, and every one would make me look like a white hare in the moonlight on a snowy night lost in my surroundings.

"Sir," she said, "you have the gift of speech."

That's not my only gift, I said. And though I often passed her in the streets of my old town, I thought from those days out I had the right to call it my own town, she never batted an eye on me. They'd scald the heart out of you.

One night, maybe it was winter time, what do I care. I don't remember all the seasons. I was sitting on the benches in the Round the Corner Theatre and there was a sort of a sing-song going forward, and I had a programme in my hand. A thin sheet of pink paper. I have the list of songs, and the singers. No, the singers have gone, before my eyes of memory I'll cry them to you now with the help of God.

"We have lost. We have gained."

"There is a home somewhere."

"Crackle Cackle."

Ah, no. I can't go on. I forget the rest. Ah, there was plenty songs and recitations. One of the reciters forgot a whole lump out of the centre of his poem. But a man on either side of me on the bench knew the words, and called them out to him together. It was a story of bandits on a rocky cliff face fighting the powers that do be annoying the people going about their unlawful occasions. But that's a joke. And that entertainment was no concert of jokers. There was only one woman performer, she had on a pink dress the colour of the programme and she sang a song of distant lands, and the man who accompanied her knelt behind her on the grey stage

on one knee, and on the other knee he had perched up a little harp. He gave two whangs of the cords before she began to sing, and again before every verse. And when her song was finished this man led the woman to the footlights, and she went down three steps into the audience and I never noticed her again. When her song was ended, there was no applause. And that was odd. The only lady singing and all the other singers and reciters and performers—there were jugglers and tumbling men—got a round roll of applause. But nothing for the young woman. But yes, she got something, for everyone hung the head to one side, or lifted its weight in his hand, resting a round cheek on a hollow palm or vice versa. I think now, with those people, it was as it was with me, for all the time the woman sang I heard nothing of the strange coloured lands she sang of. I saw only before me, as if she stood by its grey walls, an old, old house standing by a wide lake, gloomy to the centre, but fringed with dry old reeds, bone rattlers in a small breeze, blowing always for the Americas, across rock and heather and buchalawns, and sandy shore, and wide deep ocean. I hung my head as they hung theirs.

We weep together, we laugh together, we die in one deep grave.

One morning, either in early spring, or early autumn, it's all the same, I was standing by the river by the rail and a man came towards me in his shirt sleeves and he was leading two stout little horses, the peculiar little horses of the town. One had a straw saddle like an ass's straddle and one had an

embroidered quilt with a flowered surcingle, and the man in the shirt sleeves said to me:

"The stout men of the town are going round it to view it properly from the heights. What about yourself, Squire, joining them?"

Have I a right?

"Ah, my old son, you have every right. Mount now on which you choose, and ride at your ease and pleasure."

I sought the embroidered blanket, though I would have liked stirrups to rest my feet in. But the barrel of the little horse was so generously round that it supported the calves of my legs, and I could always hold the flowered surcingle. I mounted from a stone defender by the gate of a grain store, and my little horse, an entire of a deep Isabella colour, received me on his broad back with a wrinkling of his tiny black nose and a shifting of his ears. We stopped at the side door of a shop where they sold everything for carousers. You could buy the mug you drank from, take it home with you, and on sour days lift it to your lips and let imagination gurgle down the rich garlands of the ne'er do betters. From the door out stepped the owner of the house, his face turning alway from cerulean blue in its fairity to the pink of that programme I spoke to you of. He looked a darling man for a companion of the heights above the town. He leapt into the straw bed saddle. He had stirrups. He turned, as he took up the reins, to shirt sleeves and said "Adieu, enjoy yourself". Then he led the way into the main street, and across it, leaving the fountain—it was a dry day with it—on our right

hand. Then he pulled up, and around the corner, from left and right, East and West, appeared two small groups. Three horsemen in each. Solid men. Merchant Princes of the town. None of my chatting friends from the rail, or from the salt water group. All handsome men, large in the face, and calm. The hour was early and all looked fresh, bright, and ready for a day of pleasant conversation in a viewing of the panoramas, of whatever value the shifty sun might prepare for us. I was introduced to each man by a wave of the hand and a name, which you never heard me called. It was the first time I heard it and I forgot it again before the day was over. Seven of us, and me, eight, handsome young and full of fun, at that moment, in spirit. But none of my fresh friends were young in years. All solid men with sons and daughters proud of them and wives trusting them out of their sight for a time. Some of the men were turned out very showily, a white circus saddle, or a brand new saddle squeaking, or a quilt like mine, or a green damask curtain with a fringe on it. Some had nose-bags for the horses, others thought to graze them where we rested. Anyway, there was enough to share a plenty with our equine companions. Palfrey is a word we never heard. There was nothing quaint, or mediaeval, about us. We were just on our gallant selves round in the rump and switching of the tail. Some with hog manes and some with them lying down, smooth, with just a gentle wave. All us men, for I was given my package, had packages of food done up with chinese cord tied in secret knots to make you giddy. One man had a box

of cigars, covered with embellishments under his arm, and everyone had his couple of jars slung by a strap across his horse's withers.

Our leader, the man who brought me and named me, started straight up a lane which led up to the heights, with here and there a turn and a flat resting place. Most of the way up it was single file. But, at times, we rode in pairs, looking back over our shoulders and describing the scene below us—women hanging out clothes, to blow in the airs over the Fair Green. Or an early toper darting from an alley into a dark shop for his dram, and purring to himself "what of it, it's early, the mist is still on the low ground 'tis true, but the sun is over the main yard in—Samarkand."

While one of us looked back, a Sister Anning, the other watched well the road and one, with a gentle hand, guided his companion's mount. Though it should be said, now in your hearing, after all this time, that there was never a stumble all the way up nor down that day from those little horses. And they had had very little experience of hills. All their bright lives had been spent on the level of the town, sometimes chasing round the Fair Green, for extra exercise, in the break of the seasons. I think they were not grass-eaters. Their roundness was for decorative-ness and was inherited. The horses looked down on their home very seldom. They did not have that, so easily amused human instinct, for viewing the old from a new angle. One mare, before we had mounted too far up toward the heights, looked down, and saw her small foal, a filly foal, on the Fair Green

hemmed in by the women with a ring of wash-tubs. The mare whinnied and her daughter, looking about in every direction, whinnied back. And looking up, she saw something on the way to the sky that she knew was her mother. She whinnied strong and loud, and then they were both satisfied. The young one had perfect faith in her mother's poise and intelligence, and she had no idea of plunging across those extraordinary odd-looking washing tubs.

So our day began well.

When we reached as high up the hilly road as we intended to go, in that direction, we were on what was within a few feet of the topmost height, and the general view of the town, the river, the tide and the river mouth, the small cliffs and the trees to the North of the tidal river, and the islands by the beginning of the ocean. Below us, immediately, we could see into the very smoke tops of the chimneys of the town. We saw people come out into their gardens and dig a bucket full of potatoes for the dinner, and we saw a little boy with a board, with a stick mast on it, and a paper sail, go to the river side and set his ship afloat. We watched the ship sail out before the wind and we saw the current grip it and begin to drag it towards the fall. But a miracle! The ship began to go back against wind and steam toward the shore! The wily urchin had a cord fastened to his ship and we saw him pull her back hand over fist.

We dropped to the ground from our horses, tethering the boasters, but letting the mild ones wander in the bright green field where the sun was

shining. But we unloaded all the jars and the parcels of food from the horses before we left them to themselves. There were pleasant rocks sticking up out of the field, many with comfortable slopes like arm-chairs. And we sat on these and we talked a little, and listened a little, and listened a little to the noise of bees, and the murmurations of the trees and the tall wild yellow flowers, and the birds welcoming us as a scenic arrangement of the good Gods to awake their curiosity and amuse it. They being lazy and indifferent, from seeing so often season after season the same round of bud and flower, fruit and berry. It was not, now I know, early spring, but early autumn, for there was plenty of leaves, I now remember, and only the very tips curled a little yellowly.

From where we rested we could see swing round the edge of the punch bowl a wood on a height, and from its edge, could we get there, we would get a grand view of the lake, though the town might be hidden from us. We planned to go there in a little while. The edge of the field before us dropped steep into an old quarry as old as some of the houses in the town. The edge was protected with a strong hedge and a ditch, and below the quarry again, from the ledge of it, there was a green cliff falling strongly to the Fair Green. We must have been justly high for the air, compared to the town air, was hungry. But I was glad to see that there was plenty of promise of berries to provision the birds up there.

The man leaning next to me on the sunny rock was a man with an oblong face, red hair getting

grey, clean shaven, bright jawed, and about fifty or fifty-five years of age. He said to me: "Did you ever pass notice of the effect that rising up in the air has on the value of what you might read in a newspaper? You might see a statement, an announcement, an opinion, in a paper on the street level, I never read a paper in a cellar, and you might believe it just as much as the writer of it trusts you to. But if you went up a ladder and took the paper with you, and looked at the matter again, I'm saying you'd be inclined to doubt, to question the man's sayings. And if you climbed up the house to the garret, and took the paper to the window to read again—damn the lie—I believe you wouldn't credit one-fifth of what you'd have in your hand in the Newspaper. And up here in this hour, and in the day, we wouldn't believe one scratch in the whole of the paper from front to back. Has anyone got a newspaper in the pocket? Not a one. So we can't put it to the test." I looked round at the parcels of food neatly placed in a safe place, among the rocks, above the ponies' hooves, and I was glad, at that time, to see that none were wrapped in newspaper.

Someone down the line, as we sat viewing our panorama, called to the man with the oval face, and he called him Alec. He called to him because he wanted him to throw his glance up straight away over the valley of the town to a field on a hill to the North, where two twisted tall poles stood up against a white patch to the sky. They were poles of a goal where football was played, three or four spaces of time away, year or month, I did not catch. But I

caught the name Alec. Everyone had been introduced to me when we first met, all with both surnames and christian names. And now, by degrees, I was to hear the nicknames or pet names. For such men to be in such good humour as they were with each other, the names they used were imperatively pet names. I had found all the names I first heard gone in a few minutes except one Foley, and he was the only one now without a pet name. And it wasn't that he wasn't a pettable man. Indeed he seemed to me to have some refulgence that shone through him like a lantern, an ever-burning bush. The names, the nicknames, as I picked them up, perhaps not in this order exactly, but more or less, were Pigeon, The Turk, The Absolute, Pizarro and Carmine. He was the first I met, he who introduced me to the others. Though they had these pet names for each other, they all had so much of the essence of politeness that they kept all they had to say on a level suitable to a mere visiting poor fellow like myself. But not so poor. When I sat between two of them I was on the outer edge at first when Alec talked to me, as the day wore on I wore into them like an amalgamated link. Foley came along the line with his fine shining cigar box. And some smoked cigars and some pipes, and soon we began to picture ourselves as figures carved on a mountain top wreathed in a mist of smoke, and we wondered if the women and the children down below thought of us as ancient heroes of another day above them on the mountain top.

The Turk said: "I've seen as good days as this in

foreign places far away, as good to look at, but not as good to be in. This is a pet day. This is a sublime day. O God that it would last!"

"But why worry because a good thing must end. Every time you put one foot before the other it's a moving on the way. Some good steps, some stumbling ones, but only a few really bad ones. Every instant we live and live only, if a word has any meaning in itself, and that I doubt."

"You are roving, my pigeon, away. Any word has only one meaning, any man, or group of men, who try to give a second meaning to any word are guilty of putting a spoke in the everlasting wheel. I have often done it myself. Of course, we are all at it when using the common speech of men. But I mean I have often myself tried to make an old way-worn word come out and pad it to a new meaning—that's Sin."

"Sure what are words but carriers of the emotions, till the great emotions force us back into silence. I could give you a dying speech between the canvas and the footlights that would spur your timbers and melt your marrow. But if I was fit and able, and on my toes, I could, I believe, this moment, if I was down on one of those stages down below I could, with a silence ring down the curtain. But that's my vanity."

"I never saw seven vainer men (I am not able to see myself) than I see here on the hill this morning and why not. We are vain of each other."

"And we have right to be. Fine bold fellows afraid of nothing."

"I wish I could believe that of myself."

"It's easy enough if you have the determination. Any man, any hour, can make up his mind to be afraid no more of anything. Put the brave foot down quickly and sternly and stick to it.

"But there is, perhaps, in us all a yellow streak in the weave, and we are afraid it's going to show itself. There was a brave man in the old stories who cried to have a fear put him into. He thought perhaps that he was cursed because he could not be afraid. Yes, that's it, if he was certain in himself that he was cursed it wasn't apprehension. Get rid of apprehension and—whiff, all your troubles are gone."

"And then we'd miss glory. Those heroes of old they were like the man in the story without any fear, I believe they were. Then what satisfaction had they in their battles, if they ever had any battles, as we think of battles. I think they just stood off and made a grand noble song about a battle, or had some broad man make it for them. You cannot have victory on a victory. You must be victorious on another man's wincing. And when heroes fight, they fight as a rosy bouquet and they take no pleasure in withering each other, until by natural decay they all dry up together. And when at last a withered crumbled blossom is dead and like a clutch of dust in a spider's web, then the hero is no more than as if he'd never been. But still I call out 'Glory', and every one of you gets a lift in the upper garret of his stomach, isn't that so?"

"It is so, and it would be a good thing, this instant, that we should all have a little rozier from the jar.

Here, let Carmine, though he's huffed, be my Senechal and carry the jar round for me to fill up your cups. Just one round—a lark's song."

He went along the line, bold Foley, and every man took his toll from the great jar carried in the old-fashioned style, like a bonuv in the arms, by Carmine. Certainly, this drink was an encourager. As far as I knew it had no name. They never told me its inventor's name. If it couldn't kill this fear it diffused it with a glorious light. As I sipped the last drops I felt a horse's lips by my foot feeling at a piece of grass he wanted especially. I moved my foot a little way to let him munch munch where he would, and I looked down at him secretly and softly, and I wondered did he have any of this fear of fear which was so bothering us up there above the well-beloved town. And I said to myself "He has no fear". "My mottled friend," I said, he was a mottled horse, "you understand the arithmetic of causes and their ruled followers." In my thought conversation with the little horse I could use words as I liked without fear of sniggering derision. "Ah, little horse, if all of us were like you." He moved, sliding along the rim of his eye his sweeping lashes, and looked into my face with the immeasurable pity of all the created for the improved-on-creation's creatures.

Pizarro shouted out, pitching down the last of his cup, "That's the sort of bosom caresser that they talked of in the days of yore. I'm a tableau of a battle on the deep seas of wine and I have a fire-ship in my middle. *Look*, brave my lad, and let who will wear the silver-plated armour.

I love Romance,
I love Romance.
But Romance don't love me.

It flitters from me and leaves me only the cold skeleton of my own sad rectangular thoughts, and they hurt me when I move. Yes, like the man who swallowed the money-box."

Alec turned his long oval visage toward me and said "Good! Pizarro is speaking truly for us all. We all, and you are one of us, understand that this hour is a mark, a tide mark. No, not a tide mark, but a buoy marking a channel flowing through the wits of men. How inadequate are words, and the usual use of words, to give us what we want to sing into the sky. I wish I had, this moment, the gift of poetry in excelsis, but my muse of poesy was ever to me just a Second Mrs. Potiphar. My middle name's Joe, and when I fled away from her the garment that I left in her hand was the shortest, smallest bit of a leather kilt of a sonnet that ever covered a nakedness. Ah me, ah me!"

Pizarro rose up again and told us what he would do with bravery if he had it. Most everyone then said something carefully, something they intended to be memorable. But, do you see, though I remember so much, I forget their wise sayings: Then the Absolute sang and he was no singer, but he had a kind of a waving murmur that pleased us all:—

The Song of the Wave I sing,
The Song of the Molly-go-Well,

The Song of the never-so-bad,
The Song of the rim of the Sea,
The Song of the little round boat.
The Song that pushes her off,
As we go over
The Hibbidy Hubbidies
Along by the tall ship's side.
Heave up the stuff,
Heave up the stuff,
Heave up the pack-ages.
Now captain up your helm
And into the sun's eye sail away,
Sail away,
Sail away,
We're dancing on her quarter-deck.
Down below
The long bunk's like a coffin.
But not so like a coffin
Where the wild flowers blow.
I picked them on a headland
By a shore, before
We sailed away.
In the naked tumblers
By a shaking belt
They'll scent and flower away,
Down below.
How the timbers moan,
How the timbers groan,
Down below.
Some day they'll wither
And they'll die
Down below.

And through the port I'll
 throw them
 To their end
On the creaming waves
 Of the sea.
But I sail on
For to-night
I'll sleep sound,
In my narrow trough,
Down the glassy trough
 Of the sea.
So I go rolling on,
 And round.
And you come rolling with me
 Round.

I see feathered green leaves waving high.
I see a fair white sandy shore.
Men like you and I
Walking in the tide,
Calm and quiet.
The sea is indigo black,
The men are ruby black,
Not faint and fair
Like you and me.
Though some of us are black within
Tarnished with our sin
But we can play the music,
And watch the sandy shore.
We go sliding by.
And a little wave passes
 Under us,

And leaves us slackly
Rolling.
Leaves us on the deeps.
But when it meets
Its shallows
It tinkles round
The black man's thighs.
And when I sing
"Pollie, oh, lo,
Pollie, oh, lo, lo"
The dark man answers back
With a sweeter voice
Than mine.
"Pollie, oh, lo,
Pollie, oh, lo, lo, lo."
So we understand the ordinary speech
of men.
So Captain let her roll
Let her roll
On her way.

There's a shark
A-following after.
I see his big fin
Split the water.
If I had a third leg
Or Swinger
I'd swing it
To him in the deeps.

It must be hard
To search the ocean wide

For legs
To fill
Such teeth as his.
If we had a patent log
He'd eat our patent log.
But we don't need such things.

The Captain
He steers by his nostrils
By his nostrils he steers us
Through the dreepy
Seas.

His port nostril's
Full of hot pineapple smell
And the odours
Of many spices
And his starboard's
Full of cold sea water
Smells,
And the Saragossa
Sea's
And the Saragossa
Sea's
Not for you and me
Not for we's.
So with the tambourine,
And the gay guitar
We're going sailing down
The deep steps
Of the sea
Always South.
And there are rocky headlands too

And both the Captain's nostrils cold
But my wild flowers
Still hold their own
So home
Is not so far away.

But our cut-water's
Cutting water
Splashing through a wide ocean
Ocean, ocean, ocean.
Flying fishes like decoration
In the spray.
Like decoration in a sugar spray
On the top of a
Wedding cake
Sail away, sail away
No sail's in sight
At all.

The sea is all our own
Our own
The river's bright clean green
Inside the indigo cup
Pale indigo cup.

Ahead, ahead
Spattering islands
Tall, narrow,
Narrow, narrow, narrow,
Islands.

We go through them
Clean and clever
 Through them.
Their parrots
And their bushes
 Beat our sides
As we go sliding through
The puffing wind,
Always puffing
 To our sails.
Then down the hills
 To the South
All the bright blue whales
Are spouting
 Water spouts,
Are spouting too
As wags rolling to the South.

Then up we sail to nor'ard.
The scented wind
On my ported ear.
The walrus, the whale,
And the big fine seals,
A-wallowing in the
Bright blue sea.
A sledded man
A sledding on the ice
By the brink
About, about, about
She comes,
The sunshine on my
 Starboard ear.

Whirl, whirl, whirl,
Round up, and to her bit.
Goodbye, bluff friend,
 Goodbye.
Up to it she comes.

Once again
My pink Port ear
Is turned to gold
Let her feel the bit
It is her due.

Know your style,
Throw your style
 Hearty boy.
Come, my withered wild ones
 From your shelf.
I'll leave you
Where I plucked you
Buried in the sand
Of your own Head Land.

That's my song." And Foley said "You forgot the icebergs." No other songster hove up a stave. We all began to shift about and get restless. And soon we were packing ourselves up on our little horses, and Carmine and Absolute, leading us along, talking very seriously together, making our way toward the hill with the trees which hung over the lake.

There was a valley between us and the trees' hill so we went a wide detour on the high tableland,

Partly in the lane, and then a while on a track at the side of a hedged field, and then on open moor, streaking away, with tufted bushes here and there, to the South, and I suppose, some time to the sea; but how many days it would take you to reach the sea I didn't know, and I asked no one. I don't think they knew. The sun was strong and pleasant and I rode by the Pigeon's side. His horse thought my horse a superior sort of horse, and I thought Pigeon a superior sort of man. So an interchange of good thoughts kept us easily moving over the warm grass side by side. Birds of the hill bushes fluttered ahead of our cavalcade. I believe one guard of birds took us a quarter of a mile along, and then handed us over to another guard. I saw a pair of bright stoats looking at our procession from over the edge of a rock. After a short severe penetrating look at us they were satisfied, they skipped out of my sight.

But I knew they'd taken us all in and sized us up, wrongly, I thought. I have noticed that the stoat has a way of particularising his gaze. And both these white throats, red bodies and white throats, intemperate natures, were satisfied that Carmine was a leader and an important chief among us. They thought also that we were about something important, and it was better for stoats to forget us and get about their own beady-eyed plots and plans, crossing and double-crossing, interwoven, and so annulled.

I could have sung, myself, as soon as the stoats were out of sight. But I knew the others of our troop wouldn't care for my plan of singing. They were not united in their values of the noises. But not one of

them, except perhaps Alec, would have borne with the noise of my throat. At first, at any rate, they would have been united against me. But if I could have gone on as long as Absolute did, they might have blended themselves in some way into my egregious screech. That's what I call it to you, but that's not what I thought of it. It wasn't that I hadn't a trained voice. I had had lessons, and in my young manhood often stood up on an evening in a mouldy drawing-room, when not a man in the room was completely sober, except myself. The ladies would be all sober and the soberest of them all would be the lady who accompanied me carefully, slow, and sad. I often would have to wait for her to come along. And the song I sang, my trained song was:—

Bright sparkling wine
Nectar divine
Pressed to make beauty
More glorious shine.

I couldn't have remembered any more of the words there on the hill or I might have launched out on it whether they liked it or not. Pigeon said to me, looking away to the South:—

“It looks very lonely all that country stretching away to the sky. A man should be impervious to the false draggings on of hope, who would attempt to cross a waste like that. A man that would journey long there would loose his mind I would think. No one to pet him. The wild range of grass, and herbs,

and rocks couldn't stoop to pet an unfortunate man, and even if he had a companion what better off would he be. The companion would be feeling the want of petting. A man who would embark on a sea of land like that would be a great coward, thinking he would lose all and be done with it. It is a grand thing to know of bad places and to avoid them. Some tell me that poisonous mushrooms have a bad smell. Is not that a worthy thing to be thinking on. The goodness of God."

"These things are a serious consideration to me, Pigeon," I said, "and I haven't the benefit of being a citizen of this wise town below us there behind our tracks."

"Ah," he said, "you're as good as a citizen of us and we'll prove it to you whenever the time comes. Now I've forgotten what I said. I'm a talking man. I like talking."

"I like talking too, none better. But talking takes hold of me and drags me off the ground into the high sky to where an ancient citizen of another town flew up into the sun's heat and melted the apparatus of his wings and came down to a rattling death on cruel rocks."

"Did you know that man? I heard of him once or twice."

"Indeed I didn't know him. I'm getting old but he was before my time and before my father's time."

"Ah, well, we'll let him rest."

Foley riding ahead of us looked back and called out "What are you two heroes talking about so seriously? Love isn't everything."

"He knows it isn't very well," said Pizarro, and he was looking very hard and pointed at the Pigeon. Pigeon didn't like this. He took out of his inside pocket in the flap of his coat a clarionet and blew through it a call of derision on Pizarro. And he put it away again. If he didn't pitch it in a furze bush. I don't know. I never saw it again.

Pizarro was silenced from that hour. I never heard him speak again in this life.

We were travelling along this way, quiet and easy, at the pace that suited the careful horses we rode, a long while with our faces mostly turned to the North, where a distant rubbled line of palest blue showed mountain, rock mountain. They, I thought, must have been scored with fierce wind a long time that no verdure should be growing on them. I supposed that was the way in this country I'm talking about. An odd valley here and there, cosy and warm. And then the hill tops, if they were modest and content to grow little bushes to nest small birds and to hide among their roots the small wild furred things, they could live and have their seasons, Spring and Harvest. But if they were proud and stony, stony they remained alone in the cold air where no living thing, unless in fear and hunted, would ever ask to put paw or claw on their heads.

It would be a terrible thing, I thought, to be so that every living creature would run from you, putting the distance between you. A man alone on a raft on the wide ocean has the fishes below him, and the birds of the sea above him, and when he dies some of them will pick him over and entomb

his tissues in their bodies to feed and strengthen them. But the man from whom the wild creature run will lie till he shrivels and rots, unless some pitiful one passing by heaps grey stones over him to let the stones nestle to him at least.

But from where we rode those far hills were blue and looked fair enough. And when the Westering of the sun caused it to lighten them up with yellow light, they looked as if they would be no bad place at all to lie in.

So we dawdled along. One, the Turk I think it was, had a suggestion, and he sent it down the line from mouth to mouth, that we should race our horses on a piece of fair clear grass just lying to a Southerly hand. "Ah no," Pizarro, and everybody else, called out. The day wasn't finished yet, and after all we hadn't brought them out to strive against one another, and I knew well that my bold warrior was too much the buck to wish to defeat any doe, for any dough. Now, that's a joke! a pun! It was the first I made that day and I hope it'll be the last I ever will have made for any day.

So there was no racing. How could we have raced without coloured jackets and caps and over an embroidered quilt? Our horses knew better than that. We trod our way stately, and often silent for a while, until at last we came to the edge of our open plateau. There was a clear space there, and then a little dip. And then the wood, a space for movement through the trees, and beyond the hill-side sloping down to a cliff and below the cliff the lake. The edge of the wood facing us was facing

West, and after a space of time, the sun would be burning, making the timbers crack and the rosin sweat. That wouldn't be yet. When we were pulling up, one behind each other on the edge of our plateau, Carmine signalled to Absolute to come to him, to sit on his horse there beside him. And then he motioned with his hands and we spread out in a half moon, the six other of us facing Absolute and himself.

When we were quiet in our places he addressed us as if he was a trained orator giving a set speech. He said:—

“My friends of the old town, the first horse march of this chosen band has reached the hour of the day which marks the day. Up and down this dip behind me, then through the wood to a clearing where for an hour the sun has permission to shine, there on mossy rocks and fallen trees, at their ease the horsemen of the old town will eat, the hour is right. Briefly, citizens follow me.”

Then he turned his nag round as abruptly as he could induce her to turn. And Absolute, doing the same with his mount, they lead the way down the dip and up to the entrance into the wood.

On boys on.
Such old boys! a Boy's a boy
As long as he says he's a boy.
His boyhood rests with him.

Through the track in the wood, light branches gently stroke our cheeks, the small green leaves

almost like the leaves of spring. Spots of sunlight where the bright shafts fell, and then the clear place where we sat in a round with our horses behind us. There was water for them in a bright pool by a spring, and they had their nose bags. We fell to on our food bags. Saddle bags were opened and out came everything grand, oysters, and pies, and bottles of every shape, and fruit. We had a few apples, but mostly dried fruits. There were mixtures, all on one plate, of fruit and meat, that never were mixed before, and may never be mixed again. Something in the fingering of the green shadows of the wood on our shoulders inspired each playful eater. Everyone was taking his chance in that place. And the potions that flew after were nursed to make drinkers forget every flavour but their own at the moment. One nail driving another home. The Turk had much to say of all the places where the food and the wine were nourished waiting for the day when they should nourish us. And Foley was whispering some tripping, laughing comment on every word of the Turk. But he always whispered into my blunt ear, for ever in those days I had one side of me that was always missing rumours. And half way through the meal, the Absolute raised his song again. A few lines and then he tried to remember the lines about the icebergs. But he'd forgot them. When we were satisfied, but still had our full cup on the ground beside us waiting, then we went at the playing of a child's game of long ago. The Bird and Beast and Friend. The bird, the fish, the beast, the place, the friend, and what did he do? We had

each six pieces of a bark of a tree, and we passed a lead pencil from one to another, and on each piece of bark we wrote the name of any bird we could think of, and so with the fish, the beast, and the rest. Six pieces multiplied by eight. Forty-eight pieces of bark. We were like children all the time. First finding our flecks of bark and then trying to think out the name to put on it. I believed myself the friends' names would turn out to be just shared among us.

I put the name of my horse "Nolens". Each of us, as soon as we'd written on a piece of bark, went to the centre of the clear place, where a wide saddle bag lay open and dropped the bark into the bag's mouth. Seven journeys for each of us. Good exercise. When all were safe in the dice box, for that's what it was to be, a couple of the brave boys gave it a good shaking. And then, up stalked the Absolute, the choice fell on him because he had good sight, a good rolling voice, and liked to roll it. He looked up into the sky overhead, and then pushed his hand into the bag and pulled out the first chip, and read out, in a strong voice. "The Swan, Alec, The Wild boar, The lebeenlone, the mackerel, the fountain at the rail of the river, the goat song. Carmine, The Lion, The Wren, Swan, and Nolens the Horse, the Whale, at the Mayor's House. The stoat at the Round Corner Theatre, the Salmon and Foley went away. The Tiger, the Eagle Cock wrote. The Herring at the river sang. The Linnet, the Horse, the wide-ocean, the Crow, on the Lake, talked. The Whale, the Hen, the Dragon, the Trout, the Salmon,

the Swan, laughed at the Water fall. Pizarro jumped. The lark, the little brown man, and Foley, that's all."

"What do you make of that, Absolute?" said the Turk.

"Read us our future, our fortunes." Absolute said "I'm thinking."

So while he was thinking Pigeon had to say something. He said "I don't blame Foley, and the Salmon and the stoat, for leaving the Round Corner Theatre. Nor I don't blame the Salmon, the trout, nor the swan, nor the dragon, for laughing at the waterfall. But when Pizarro jumped over my little brown friend here and Foley and the lark, it was surely a grand jump, especially if the lark was singing." And before Pigeon was finished, Absolute sitting there on his green log, began talking out of his throat very level and looking down, on the ground between his feet. The chips of bark were scattered everywhere, for as soon as he had read them he had thrown them from him. He said "I find our story comes this way to me, sitting, here at peace for a draught of time. I find it that we have great beauty near us, and intelligence, and wild thoughts of ancient glories in the skies. That all knowledge is near us, that we may fill ourselves with it, and leave to poor clods the idling by the side of an old battlefield. But our wildness leads us on. And we will not lose friendships, nor bravery, nor the kindness of little things. Our town goes on in steadiness for a time. They think a great deal of us and often speak of us. Many may try to imitate us. But we, because of our clearness of sight into the distance, our bold

courage and our friendship for one another, leave our imitators a glory they cannot follow. The greatest magicians of all the days will make a recording of us. To far countries our fame will be carried. And in the farthest shores of our own country we will be held in great esteem. And our noble friends who have known us will tell tales, about us with happiness and joy. We make one great leap and I think our little brown friend is in that leap with us. That's all, and it's the last."

We were full fed with our lunch, and with our fortune, and we might have left it so. But one by one we began going to our little horses, and following one another. Who started the way first, I couldn't tell, we strolled steadily up the hill to the Westward of the wood until we reached an open space where, presently, the gold sun sinking would be shining strong and healthy. It was a spot well chosen to let the whereabouts of our cavalry be known to every man on any hill, on any point of the compass, and even from the bridge of the town. Though from the deep streets of the town all this head of lands was hidden.

Every man tied up his small horse, so that he or she could not stray but could stand easy. And there was sweet enough grass in the place. When our horses were tethered we began tumbling after each other down the hill like boys let out of school. Some of us in twos walked about on the slope of the hill that was above the cliff that came down to the lake. I found I was alone without a companion, though

there were four pairs of us. Eight all told, at that hour, and that day. I went down quietly like a man walking on his tip toes to the edge of the field that came down above the cliff. There was nothing on the edge but a ragged poor straggling light hedge of brambles. I thought: Nothing here to stop stampeded calves let alone grown cattle. I stepped through the little barrier and I looked back up the slope of the field, and I saw my friends wandering about in pairs and one group of three, Absolute, the Turk and Carmine were together talking, the heads together as if they were all getting in a word when they could. Foley was beside Pizarro, and Foley was waving his arms and laughing at his own fun, but Pizarro was, I could see, looking about him dumb. When I was through the hedge I found the foot or so of cliff head crumbly and light. I stood carefully, putting my weight well on my feet spread out. I looked over and I saw, instead of deep water to the cliff foot as I expected, there were stones heaped only a few feet under water close in, as if some sliding away of the cliff had settled there. I brought my eyes up the cliff face and I saw a ledge of slaty rock sticking out. I had not seen it before. I thought: Maybe the earth slipped away taking stones and rubble away there and left the ledge. I thought: Maybe that is a ledge that was not exposed to a man's eye since this land was heaved up out of the broken crust holes of the earth.

I looked out over the surface of the lake. It wasn't wide there. It was beginning to shape itself to the size of the river, I looked at the smooth surface. It

was a happy blue of a tinge I liked. I could have, perhaps, thrown a big stone, if I could have found a suitable one under the hedge, and broken the surface of that fair face of water. But I had no wish to do so. I thought: I am glad I'm no longer a foolish giddy-pated fat red-faced boy, desiring to be for ever throwing stones, to make a little splash in water, or a little spatter in mud. And I was at that moment a little old brown man and an hour before I would have been insulted, and wounded, to be called 'a little old man'. I thought to myself: It can't be so bad to be old, if you have no aches. Have I any? Not a one. But I may have plenty another day. But what about another day?: "Beautiful lake," I said. I made the words, though I did not speak them out, not even whispering, "it is an insult to you that I should not be happy gazing on you so severe and anxious to give away happiness with the air above you". These were silly thoughts to have, a man might say. But hadn't I a right to have them there by myself, only me and the lake and the great arched sky above us. In my pride, and vanity, I forgot that I had seven friends wandering in the field, along the slope behind me. I turned toward the hillside and my friends had ceased to wander and were sitting, slung out side by side, across the hill's face, fifty yards from where I stood at the cliff's edge. One of them, it was Absolute, raised his hand to me. I raised mine, and began weaving up the slope to them. Absolute made way for me on his left, and Pizarro moving a little away. I sat down between them. As I sat down I gave a little puff of

air from my open mouth. A slant of sun was pouring diagonally across us. There was great warmth in it, and after looking at the lake, and then climbing up even the short slope, I was languid in myself. Absolute said "That puffed you now, and it would have puffed any of us here. You came up quickly to us while we have just been wandering across, and across the soft grass." And with this he turned his face along the line to the left beyond me and he went on "How is it with us all up here at this time of the day. I'm thinking it's a long while since I was a boy strong, and lepping from rock to rock in my strength, and never a thought of little girls, but always for the game that would take skill and always, defying everything, and everybody. If I saw a fence I must leap it. If I saw a gate too big to vault I must climb I would say, 'I never unhasped a gate'. And now here I am paunchy and quiet." And Foley said "You're not so paunchy at all and not so quiet either to-day. When I was a child I thought as a child. When I was a young man I thought as a young man, and now I'm not so very old an old man I think that way. But thinking's one thing, doing's another, and I give you my frozen word talking's another thing altogether. I can lay my hand under my heart, I thank God, and say I never spoke a word of truth in my life unless I was forced to it. But I never missed a chance of holding the floor if I'd get a laugh out of someone, and I was never hard to please, any laugh would do. In fact, without offence to any old discerning friends, I'd as soon, indeed sooner, have a good guffaw from a common

mug than a tittered appreciation, behind the hand, from an æsthetic appreciator of good things. I thought my joke was a mistress to be enjoyed by myself only. The first joke I ever made, and I've forgotten it. Anyway, if I haven't, it would be too small to tell you. I made it when my voice was breaking, and it was the way they say. 'It wasn't what he said so much as the funny way he said it.' This is a secret, now when secrets matter no more. But the true entertaining wit is made at the breaking of the voice. Isn't that a deep and curious thought? There'd be a group of four or five boys standing together and up I'd roll and say, very throaty, maybe, 'Fine day men' or 'rough work on the old quayside' and they'd all look sideways at each other and laugh. Fun was before sense. I give you my word on that also."

Then a deep voice on my right hand took up the running—the talking. "I was, when I was a boy, always travelling in my mind, looking at pictures of foreign lands, or reading a book that I'd borrow from some silly old man who never opened it except to shut it again, for fear he'd be tempted. A book about travelling in strange countries among the elephants and the little East Indian buffaloes. A printed picture inside of a sweetie box, or a toilet soap box, showing bright blue seas and palms swishing in the breeze, would have me walking on my toes and reaching up with my chin, thinking I was swimming through a warm sea to follow the wild Islands. They put me sitting on a high old grey stool in my uncle's office. But all the time my mind

was far away even when I was slapping the watery brush copying out the letters, and sitting on the letter book, because it was easier than working the press. I was careering through an air that had more space to it than the sour old office where they'd had a fire in the grate there, once, in the year One. The boy before me in that outer office before he cleared out, and he went away following the sea, took a brush of red lead and painted flames up the back of the grate. Every time Uncle Hardy—that's what they called him—saw the flames he'd laugh and go over and pretend to warm his hands before them. And that on a black frost day with the pump in the yard wound in yellow straw. I tell you when I left these lands I laid my course for a warm winter land. And when the sweat would be rolling off me, and I was down to under the seven stone, and I was scraping my arms down with an old stiff collar, the way they scrape a racehorse, with a hoop iron, I was glad.

"I soon saw elephants, and later on again I saw the wild horses. And anything I could buy and sell again, I'd buy. I never bought an elephant. But I always had a muffler full of trinkets. It's wonderful what a little journey will do, or did in those days, to add value to a penny new nothing.

"I think I was the only man, though I wasn't much more than a boy, walking any distance in those parts. Any range of low hills would bring me to another place, and a better price. And a queer lot of names I went by. Anything they called me I'd answer to. And, even if I was dealing with people

who understood my speech, I always gave them any name that came into my head.

"If I had a choice this minute, and could cast off a stupid old aching body without splitting it away from my human spirit, I would choose to visit all those old places, East, West, and South. But that could never be I suppose—or could it? But what matter, everything would be changed, if I was not, or again, maybe if I was still the same they would be the same too."

"Ah, you talk too much," I heard the voice of Carmine away down the farthest from me, on my left hand. "You talk too much of old days. I'm as good a boy and as young as ever I was in my spirits, and I never had to go away from the streets of the little town where I was born. I only had to put my little round head back on my narrow little neck and look up and see the wild clouds tearing across the sky from God-knows-last to God-knows-next, and I was enjoying their journey. A Circus poster pasted on the wall of the old distillery would send my little heart galloping in circles. I saw a shooting star one night looking through the window in the roof. And I saw him again the second night, and the third night. Then he quit. It was time he did. I thought he was my own little dog and I only had to whistle to see him sport himself. That was a queer state of mind for a child, and I've been in a queer state of mind, I think, ever since. When I was getting on to be a young fellow, one day, I was down the quays and there was a vessel there, they were drying her sails, and I walked aboard of her, and I as near, as

a touch, walked into her hold gazing up along her sails into the sky above her mast head. And the mate of the ship was sitting on the cabin skylight, sorting out the signal flags, and laying them out under the sun, and he began telling me the way sailors on the oceans spelled out messages, me that could not ever leave my native land to travel on the seas. I took up a handful of flags in my hands and I spread them out and I said to that mate 'What do they spell?' he said 'We are sinking, no bread, no water, we've got a dirty necked boy aboard that'll never work. Now go ashore to hell out of that.'

"I left him, he was a savage man. But taking one thing with another I would not care to be young again. If I twist an old neck and shoot up old eyes, the clouds and the sky above the house tops look just as good to me as they did when I was in my youth."

And then Carmine's voice was drowned under the booming voice to the Eastward. "Ah," it bellowed, "I was never a boy, I was born with spurs on, and a saddle under me. I saw all the world from a saddle always, and I couldn't tell you when youth was blent into age, if I am aged now. But you don't know that—not one of you. I tell you, the things I saw, looking down on them below me on the surface of the land, would age any one of you, in a moment of time. I saw a yellow-skinned man lying on his back on a broad brown coloured place in a starved country, and he had a long hafted knife run through his belly into the ground. He was staring at the dark blue sky. He wasn't seeing it. He was dead and

died a long time. We, in this place, saw in our time a man pinned to the ground with a knife, and though we didn't like it, it didn't make us afraid. And I wasn't afraid of my man dead on his back. But I reached down out of saddle, and I picked up the man's hat, where it was lying, crown up. I caught it delicately, pinching in the soft crown between my fingers, and then I leant out over the dead man, and I gave the hat a spin to make it fall sweetly, and it came down on the man's face and closed it against the cruel sky. I never got down out of saddle off the back of my horse, and now you would wonder why. It wasn't that I wasn't ready to show respect to the dead. No man who ever travelled so many roads as I but would take great liberties with himself to show respect to the dead.

"Well, when I was a boy, and I'm not such a very old one now, I was ever ready to show respect to the dead, I often thought of myself carrying dead bodies, that were killed by the act of God, an earthquake, or a storm washing them up on a dark stony coast.

"I took great care of my muscles and would keep them in great shape against the time I would be carrying the dead on my back to give them decent burial. I was all for good graves. If I heard the grave diggers with their spades hitting heavy earth, or rattling on a stone, in some wayside graveyard out of this town in the country parts I'd go in and say 'not deep enough'. I thought, I was but a child, for a long while, for too long, that I was under an Order to make grave diggers show respect. I ever thought of those things. I was always picking

little bunches of wild flowers and making little nosegays, and giving them to my mother, and she would take them from me, and let her dear eyelids droop for a moment and look at them and say 'what a solemn look is on you my son. It is to a young girl you ought to be giving the pretty flowers'. But I would say nothing."

And then with a fiery quickness he reached out his left hand and caught the hand of the man on his left, and so the grasping hand, like a wave, came on to me. From both sides it came, and there I was, centred with my right hand, and my left grasped in a fierce hold. They all rose then to their feet and began running down the hillside toward the low brambles at the cliff top. And they were going faster every galloping tread. And I then saw myself a boy on a winter day, with a crackling frost, long ago, and two boys, bigger than I, had me by the hands and were dragging me along the ice. I remembered clearly the dragging at my arms, and how ahead was a piece of rotten ice, and how I went through it, and it was a shallow pond, and I was wet and muddy but unhurt. I remembered the queer feel in my thighs as I sat on my heels while the boys dragged me on. Then all came clear into my breast as action. There on the green slope I went down on my hunkers, on my heels. No smooth ice under me now but soft spongy grass land. My boots, with the weight of my body on them, put a drag into the ground. The neighbouring hands held to mine, and mine to theirs. The men began to stagger in the running. I lay back all

my weight and, just on a little space of earth, a little flattened in front of the thorns, the whole row of men stopped. One by one they released their hands, Last of all they released mine. I sat back panting, and tired into the pit of my stomach, on the grass. The men looked at me without either blame or forgiveness.

In a few minutes one of our little horses whinnied high up above us, where he was standing a little way from the others, with the sun round him like a gold fringe. So we all turned our faces toward him and climbed slowly up the field, and, slow as we went, we found we were all short of breath and puffing, when we got to our horses' sides. We delayed a little packing about the saddles what was valuable of the utensils of our picnic.

We mounted and our horses stepped gently along the piece of level road, placing the curve of the crescents of their shoe marks facing West, above the crescent of the morning which had faced East.

I looked down by my horse's gentle side, and in the soft ground I saw, that symbol of my life a crescent on a crescent reversed and interlaced.

When we got on the hard down-hill lane, we had to lean back on our horses' quarters. I was afraid we would incommode them, but they were sure-footed as we were fumbling, in our minds, for I know at that time, and until we reached the depth of the town and went to our homes, we were in a state neither dawn, nor evening, nor midday, nor night, like straw bottles floating on a sea. In the place by the fountain, and I declare to my God, I

never in all my days in that town, saw the fountain pouring its strength up into the air so strongly, we gave our horses to those who came and took them from us and we scattered to our own places.

I went up into my room and I lay on my bed. I only took off my shoes. I slept until the very middle of the night, when I woke. And on the chair by my bedside, there was food and drink put there by my old people who cared for me. I ate and drank and slept again. The sun on my face woke me. I got up. I put on my shoes. I went down into the street. I spoke to two men, they told me that the Mayor had been thought dead. He had fallen in the street a while ago. He had been carried up to his room and laid on his bed, unmoving. His wife had looked in through the door at him, and she had laughed and said: "He went at last". He heard her. He vomited blood on the floor, and then he rose and walked down the stairs. By the stairs' foot his daughter stood. He turned his face to her and said "It is your poor father", and she said nothing. He walked up the street, in the very middle of it, and turned up the steep hill road, and no one followed him but a little boy. He was a fat little boy and his little heart was beating to keep up with the Mayor.

While the men were telling me their story a body of men in dark clothes, like sailormen from far away, came down the centre of the street carrying a body stretched out on their shoulders. It was the Mayor. The sailors having taken a boat and liquor, and bread, had gone rowing up the river. And high above them on a ledge on the cliff face, half way

down, with the poor thorn hedge above, and among the thorns a little boy kneeling, they had seen a man's body lie. And two of them had climbed the cliff face and brought down the dead man, his neck broken. I moved away from the three men. I said nothing to anyone. I stood on the roadway, on the bridge, and there came towards me, a stout and stiff built man on a red big-boned horse, such as never came from that country. He turned his face downwards to me and he said: "Will you show the way out of the town—the shortest way—and to the South?"

"I will do that, sir," I said. "But your horse is big-made for a steep hill."

"He will climb it you will find."

So I climbed the road beside the man and the horse, up the steep road I had climbed on my little horse the day that had just left us. When we reached the level top the man said to me "Will you amuse yourself by coming further to the South, this horse can carry double". And he moved the red horse nearer to the bank. I got up on the bank and sat behind the man, and I felt the horse's warm back warm me in the fork. We rode a long while. The man never spoke to me only to the birds. If they gave a chirrup, he gave a chirrup back.

The man had some food with him in an oilskin roll and a jar of strong drink that tasted like flowers. When the promise of the night was showing in the sky we came to a rough hill on our Western hand. There were whins growing on it and behind it the sun was sinking. The man moved his horse along

a dip in the road towards the South, and I saw smoke rising from a small town. I was thinking of nothing, when a man came out of a gateway to the West and he led a brown stageen of a horse, by a straw halter, and he looked up at me, and he said "Come down out of that, sir, it isn't meet that two should ride the one horse into our old town. Take this horse of mine and let him take you up the path, up through the whins, a short way to the town". I got down. I held the hand of the man who rode the red horse a moment, and I mounted the brown and rode up the hill and that's my story, sir.

By the same author

LIFE IN THE WEST OF IRELAND

SLIGO

SAILING, SAILING SWIFTLY

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